DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 315 166 PS 018 556

AUTHOR Hewes, Dorothy W.
TITLE Entrance Age to Public Education in the United States, 1642 to 1842.
PUB DATE 11 Aug 89
NOTE 17p.; For related documents, see PS 018 563-565.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Early Childhood Education; Educational History; *Educational Practices; Federal Government; Financial Support; Government Role; Parent Role; *Preschool Education; *Primary Education; *Public Opinion; *Public Schools; *School Entrance Age; Social Attitudes; Social Change; State Government

ABSTRACT

This paper traces the interface between preschool and Centre of the Netherlands, Dook Kopmels, presented a workshop that focused on first 200 years of American education. The paper also covers reasons for changes in entrance age and in funding and indicates the relevance of these changes for current issues in early childhood education. Sections address: (1) the colonial period: 1642-1776; (2) post-revolutionary common schooling from 1777-1840; (3) infant schools with public funding, and their decline by 1842; and (4) current public funding issues. It is asserted that public opinion about the education of young children has demonstrated a continuity since the early colonial days of America, its roots being in the Calvinistic beliefs of the Puritans. During the past 3.5 centuries, other philosophies and systems have fertilized and been entwined with those roots, but basic elements remain. Preschools remain primarily funded by parents of the children enrolled. Public schools are provided for through tax revenues. Entrance age dropped from 7 to 4 or 5 years. Since play is still suspect as a way of learning, expenditure of tax funds for child care centers or other programs is considered justified only for pre-academic compensatory education for children of families considered to be so deficient that their children will grow up to be a burden on society. (RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED315166

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Presented to 11th International Conference
for the History of Education, Oslo
August 11, 1989

ENTRANCE AGE TO PUBLIC EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES, 1642 TO 1842

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Dorothy W. Hewes
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Dorothy W. Hewes
San Diego State University, USA

PS 018556

The time span of 1642 to 1842 covers the American Colonial era and the transition period following independence from England. During these two centuries, the idea underlying public education was neither humanistic nor socialistic. It was not to educate children for their personal advantage, nor was it to benefit the parents of those children. The basic reason for the first educational legislation in 1642 was to enforce a system of learning believed to be advantageous for the general population; in today's business terminology, it had to be cost effective to become adopted. The age at which children were admitted to public education during the subsequent three hundred years has maintained that criterion. Like other educational innovations, preschool programs have needed to pass that test of public advantage to obtain public resources. Changes in the age of entrance and in the relationship between preschool education (privately funded)) and elementary education (public tax supported) have been accomplished through popular awareness and acceptance of anticipated benefits during times when economic and other factors were favorable. This paper traces the interface between preschool and elementary school as it has been reflected by public funding during the first two hundred years of American education, discusses some of the reasons for these changes, and indicates their relevance for current issues in early childhood education.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The Colonial Period - 1642 to 1776

Some American colonies were established as commercial enterprises, while others were groups seeking freedom to practice their own religion. Cubberly (1920) pointed out that colonial educational programs were consistent with the beliefs of these early settlers. There were French Huguenots along the Carolina Coast. Calvinist Dutch and Walloons established New Amsterdam (which became New York) and some settlements to the south along the Allegheny Mountains. Quakers from England founded Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love. There were Swedish Lutherans along the Delaware River. German Moravians, Lutherans, Mennonites and others located in what is now Pennsylvania. Spanish colonies in the south and west, beginning with St. Augustine in 1565, often centered around the Roman Catholic missions. Some of these colonists established church control of schools and resented any state interference. Others allocated public funds for the vocational education of paupers and orphans, but expected the majority of families to provide for their children through tutors or private schools. None of these, in the colonial period, instituted public education for all children.

Schooling with public tax funds was developed by the Puritans, those dissenters from the English national church who had established Plymouth Colony in 1620. Hundreds of additional Puritans arrived during the next two decades, settling in what is now the Boston area and forming the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Their "Massachusetts Law of 1642" was the first legislation in the English-speaking world to order that all boys and girls be taught to read. Although they had been Separatists under England's King James I, devoutly believing that church and state should be distinct entities, the Puritans established a combined civil and religious town government in which education was a major concern. George Martin, official historian of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1894, emphasized the close relationship between education and religion of these Puritan towns. According to Calvinist doctrine, children were born sinners who must find their salvation through

Bible study and self-contemplation; with a child mortality rate of around fifty percent, it was seen as vital that this process begin as soon as possible. This 1642 law allocated no funds. It simply ordered that all children should be educated, but it established an important precedent by imposing a legal obligation upon parents. It was apparently not very effective, since in 1647 the Puritan government passed another law requiring each town of fifty families to raise money for a schoolteacher and each town of one hundred householders to provide a grammar school to prepare youths for college, with a fine for those that did not comply. Young children were still taught to read by parents or a tutor at home or at the dame school operated in the home of a neighbor woman. Grammar (elementary) school education began at the age of seven or eight, although some who could conform to discipline in the ungraded public school were sent much earlier. There are scattered reports of young children being kept in fenced areas in the back of the classroom while the older ones did lessons, so in one sense this might be seen as the first public funding for early childhood programs.

During the first century and a half, the age at which children began school seemed to attract little attention. There was a tendency for parents to allow older students -- those mature enough to do useful work -- to attend only during cold winter months when they had nothing better to do. Younger children predominated during the warmer weather, partly to keep them occupied and out of the way of busy adults. Attendance of all children was irregular, and might consist of short periods of schooling over many years. Boys from the more elite families might attend private grammar schools, with college following at about age fifteen for those who were destined for the ministry or other scholarly occupations. Formal education, whether public or private, had little relevance to the life skills needed by these children. Instead, they accompanied older same-gender family members and learned how to perform the multitude of tasks necessary for survival in a spartan new land.

Because Calvinists saw it as a God-given responsibility, some Massachusetts parents were eager to teach reading at the earliest possible age. There are reports of precocious five-year-olds during

the Colonial period who not only read the English Bible fluently but were well along in Greek and Latin. In his autobiography, for example, the Reverend John Barnard wrote that his parents had "devoted" him to the ministry from the moment of his conception and "accordingly took special care to instruct me themselves . . . and kept me close at school to furnish my young mind with the knowledge of letters." By age six, in 1687, he had read the Bible three times and was serving his private reading teacher as "a sort of usher" to teach reading to other children. Like most boys and some girls, Barnard entered public grammar school at age eight after home and private lessons. Because he was destined to become a minister, he graduated from Harvard College.

Perhaps the most complete account of home schooling is from the 1706 diary of Cotton Mather, a prominent minister who "entertained" his children with stories, "applauded" them when they did something positive, and noted that "As soon as tis possible, I make the Children to write . . . the most agreeable and profitable Things I can invent for them." However, Alice Morse Earl, in her 1899 account of colonial childhood, wrote that the Token for Children by English minister James Janeway was one of the most popular books, but that Cotton Mather's additions for the American edition "out Janewayed Janeway" with his emphasis upon virtuous children such as those who chided their parents for not praying enough. One "had such extraordinary meltings that his eyes were red and sore from weeping on his sins." Another was said to lie in her cradle at age two and a half and ask "What is my corrupt nature?" and then answer herself, "It is empty of Grace, bent unto Sin, and only to Sin, and that Continually." (1899, pp 250-251) Early children's books printed in the colonies, including the famous New England Primer of about 1690 with its alphabet beginning "A - In Adam's fall we sinned all" and its authorized catechism, prayers, and other religious necessities, emphasized the sovereign domination of God and the Christian responsibility of carrying out that which was for the public good.

Although other ideas about learning were soon imported from Europe, up to the twentieth century the prevailing educational

philosophy was what we now call dualism, the belief that one's body and mind are separate, that development of the mind is the sole function of education, and that the faculties of the mind are developed through exercise. Just as an athlete develops bodily muscles through either either running or gymnastics, so does a student develop mental faculties through studying Greek or reading the Bible. For example, in an 1878 address to the New England Historic Geneological Society, Dorus Clark reminisced about the annual public recitations of the Catechism which had been expected of all boys between the ages of eight and fifteen. This lengthy series of questions and answers was not only the recitation of the basic Calvinistic creed but was a major component of the grammar school curriculum. After lauding the accomplishments of these grammar school graduates, the speaker attributed not only "large intelligence" but also "sobriety, sound morality and unfeigned piety" to this study and memorization, insisting that it "could not fail to exert a most marked influence upon the intellectual powers." Furthermore, since mind and body were considered to be separate, exercise of mental functions needed to occur when the body was quiet. Because of this concept of dualism, there was little concern for the reading level of materials provided for students, and all ages were educated together after they had learned basic reading skills.

The writings of John Locke, first circulated in the colonies around 1700, introduced his ideas of parental responsibility, his critisicms of pedantry, and his exhortations for self improvement. Cremin (1970) notes that Locke's views both symbolized and strengthened a developing utilitarianism about learning that was coming to prevail in the Anglo-American world at the time of his death in 1704 but adds that his ideas were even more widely disseminated in popular literature that purported to reflect his views. Earle reported that Locke's 1690 Thoughts on Education had many ardent followers in the new world who dipped the feet of their small children in cold water every morning, fed them wholesome foods, and bedded them down on hard mattresses but who also encouraged swimming, dancing, and play in the fresh air. Her cultural history of child life during these years takes away the

austerity of more recent formal studies and indicates that most home learning experiences of young children were devopmentally appropriate. Life held more than books and prayers. This is consistent with statements such as one made by John Cotton, one of the original Puritan ministers, who noted that it is perfectly normal for young children to "spend much time in pastime and play, for the boyes are to weak to labour and their minds too shallow to study. The first seven years are spent in pastime, and God looks not much at it" (Morgan, p. 66).

The colonial period established a precedent that public education should be for children above seven years of age. It made reading ability the most highly esteemed accomplishment of education, with early reading particularly valued. In addition, it established a precedent of family "ownership" and responsibility for the welfare of young children, rather than community or public responsibility. For worthy families unable to assume their God-given duties, Christian charity was to be provided by those members of the community who had been blessed with abundance. Expenditure of public funds was authorized only when it was obvious that family inadequacies in caring for their children would have a negative impact upon the entire community.

Post-Revolutionary Common Schooling - 1777 - 1840

The thirteen original states declared their independence from England in 1776. For about twenty years before the Revolutionary War, during the wartime and reorganization period of 1775 to 1789, and for another twenty years afterward, little interest was devoted to education at any age level. Preceeding the actual conflict there was much political strife. Afterward, with a population of under four million people, the new United States of America faced debts of an unprecedented $75,000,000. Commerce was almost non-existent and major towns had been partially or completely demolished. The former colonies were involved in disputes internally and with one another.

When the federal Constitution was approved in 1789, it made no mention of education, perhaps because almost all of the men involved with its preparation had been educated by private tutors or in private schools. Because the bond between the states was still tenuous, all rights not specifically delegated to the new federal government were deemed to be the domain of the individual states. The lack of federal educational policy for the past two centuries can be at least partially attributed to this decision.

The post-revolutionary period was primarily one of adjustment. In education, it was marked by the decline of a Calvinist religious motive for education and the emergence of a belief that schooling was essential for all participating members of a democratic nation. However, in his detailed analysis of state provisions, Cubberly stated that there was no real educational concern before about 1820 because the nation was poor, there was little need for literacy beyond the simplest levels, and no important political decisions had been required of the voters.

Under Constitutional provisions, each new state was responsible for setting up its own educational system and most either ignored or postponed a solution. Only Massachusetts made specific tax funds available for schools from the beginning, including a continuation of the support that had been given Harvard College

since its founding in 1636. The Massachusetts Education Act of 1789 was also the first to specify equal enrollment opportunities for girls. This inadvertently resulting in the increased attendance of younger children because older sisters with responsibility for their care took them along to their ungraded classrooms. However, it was still assumed that families would teach their children how to read before entering them in grammar schools. Concern for parents unwilling or unable to provide private schooling or to teach children at home, combined with increased protests by teachers about the disturbances caused by young children in schools, led to a series of public protests in Boston in 1817 and 1818. As a result, a Primary School Board was appointed. It determined that public education should begin at age four and soon established primary classes with female teachers in rented rooms throughout the city. Although these were still not viewed as an integral part of the "real" school system, they were supported by public funds.

The new United States of America was a sparsely populated country dependent upon agriculture and small businesses. Major changes came when immigration increased and domestic industry was supplanted by factories. As Moore has noted, "The factories which sprang up needed workers, and people flocked from the country into the towns . . . little more than hastily constructed cmaps without adequate housing, adequate sanitation, adequate police and health regulations. Ignorance, disease, drunkenness, poverty, and crime flourished in them. Then came the hard times of 1819-1821, which made conditions so desperate that great humanitarian movements took form to alleviate them. Among these . . . a mighty movement in behalf of popular education, preaching a veritable crusade against the evils of the time by the creation of tax-supported schools" (p. 12-13) The greatest impetus for this movement was from Massachusetts, where colleges and seminaries had continued to educate teachers and ministers. These men, accompanied by their educated wives, had then moved out across the developing nation to frontier communities, so that virtually all of the educational leaders during the 1800s were descended from Colonial Calvinist families and were products of Massachusetts institutions or those in nearby

New England towns. They also organized and dominated the organizations that controlled textbook publishing, teacher training, and elementary education, beginning with the 1829 organizational meeting in Boston of the American Institute of Instruction.

Innovations during this period were primarily for older children. Sunday schools, developed for English working children, were never popular in the United States because they violated the Sabbath; they soon became church sponsored Bible study classes for all children. Various types of charity schools were established but dame schools still served many families as combined day care and primary classes. Private schools and tutors for children of prosperous families were continued to prosper. The brief flurry of Lancastrian schools began in 1806 was assimilated into public schools by the 1840s. As Cremin (1951) has detailed, the public elementary schools were poorly funded, poorly taught and attended primarily by those families who were unable to provide a private education for their children.

Infant Schools with Public Funding

The continued presence of preschool age children in the public schools is noted through complaints such as those made by Boston teachers of the 1830s. According to Pence (1980), even though the total per cent of eligible students attending school did not rise appreciatively from 1830 to 1860, numbers of older students increased while those aged three to five were reduced. This was because state after state, between 1850 and 1880, enacted specific legislation to prohibit children under age five or six from attending the public schools. Since most grammar schools would not accepted children until they could read and write, the introduction of Infant Schools based upon those of England appeared to be one solution. Enthusiastic women's philanthropic associations, church groups, and concerned male educators joined in their support. As originally conceived, children in Infant Schools were to be given amusements and instruction from the age of three. The version adopted in Boston in 1816, with a city appropriation of $5000 to supplement the charitable contributions, admitted children at age four to a system of drills and book learning geared toward the early literacy that had been previously taught at home. Within the next ten years, the concept was adopted by most cities, either as charity schools or as the lowest level of the public school system. Three books, Wilderspin's Infant Education: or Remarks on Educating the Infant Poor (1823), Thomas Pole's Observations Relative to Infant Schools (1823), and the Reverend William Wilson's The System of Infant Schools (1825) were apparently best known. By 1826, William Russell stated in the inaugural issue of the American Journal of Education that "Public sentiment has undergone a favorable change on the subject of early education. Learning is made easy and pleasant . . . of all the attempts which have been made to render the morning of life a season of pure enjoyment, the system of infant schools seems the most successful" (Pence p 48).

In 1825, just as American Infant Schools were reaching their height of popularity, Robert Owen's utopian enterprise of New Harmony was established in rural Indiana. A model Infant School was included. William Maclure, a wealthy Philadelphia businessman

who had visited Pestalozzi in Yverdun, was responsible for hiring Joseph Neef to direct its educational program for children aged two and up. Athough the project was short-lived, it created an additional element of support for the education of young children and for the concept of education without severe physical discipline which had deterred many parents from public schooling. Because Pestalozzi believed that education was a matter of growth from within, from the child's learning to use its own mind rather than memorizing rote lessons, these classes at New Harmony provided an example of what preschool education might become. According to Altfest (1977), their most important contribution appears to have been the contrast provided with typical American Infant Schools which were oriented toward Locke's idea of the child as a well disciplined and quiet "blank slate" instead of Pestolozzi's vision of lively interacting individuals exploring and learning from their environment.

The decline of Infant Schools during the 1830s was due less to ideological reasons than to a new emphasis upon the maternal role in caring for and educating children at home. This social change was reinforced by an increased awareness of their harmful effects. Criticisms by authority figures were widely distributed. For example, Amariah Brigham, director of an asylum for "insane" adults, wrote that "Early mental excitement will only serve to bring forth beautiful but premature flowers which are destined soon to wither away without producing fruits." Pence notes that this was picked up and elaborated upon by others who wrote pronouncements condemning "the attempt to render Infant Schools mere hot houses for the precocious development of intellect" and rejoicing that they had "happily failed." Ladies of the Boston Infant School Society accepted their inadequacies after seven years of labor and found it to be "too large an undertaking" which they were "anxious . . . to place in the hands of gentlemen." There had never been a coordinated effort for support of the Infant Schools, partly because there had been no uniform philosophy or method of teaching, partly because there was not basic structure to fit it into. Application of the concept varied widely In some, babies just learning to walk had been accepted, with the idea that they also would learn to read and write.

In others, only primary age children were accepted. Pence characterizes the Infant School movement as "a leaderless campaign composed of many individual battles" (Pence, pp. 74-76).

By 1842, only a few Infant Schools remained. In some cities, such as Philadelphia and New York, they were successfully assimilated into the public schools as primary classes for children aged four to six. In others, such as Boston, primary classes already in existence were strengthened by the public awareness of Infant Schools. Even in cities where there appeared to be no continuation, they did make a difference. One prominent early supporter asked in 1833, "Whence has arisen the great change, within six years, in the manner of presenting facts to children?" He answered his own question by saying that it was due to the Infant Schools, that "The spirit has been extended much more than the system itself -- and it ought to be . . . . until it renovates the whole theory and practice of modern education" (Woodbridge, 1833. p. 304). Henry Barnard, who was later to introduce the Froebel kindergarten to the United States, wrote in 1838 that "Even in some places where they have been given up and where prejudices exist against them, surrounding schools are better, in some respects, than they were before (p 14).

As the maternal role within the family home received more emphasis, publications designed to instruct women in their duties became popular. Before 1800, women's publications were imported. In the early part of the century, several were established in the United States. Mother's Magazine began in 1832, Mothers' Assistan in 1841, and Parents' Magazine in 1840. Meetings for mothers started about 1815 and maternal associations soon formed across the country. Their primary concern was for the moral and intellectual education of their children and how to "break their will" to make them obedient and dutiful. John S. C. Abbott, in a popular parenting book published in 1834, reiterated the Puritan belief that the primary object of education is to prepare the child for its heavenly home and he gave detailed instructions about bringing children "under perfect subjuction." Although their philosophy differed from Froebel's, these mother's groups and publications were later to be vital in disseminating the kindergarten idea. In 1842, however, most

people supported the old concept of young children remaining in their own homes or the homes of dame school teachers.

Innovative programs for young children originated primarily in the Boston area, initiated by Unitarians, Transcendentalists, Hegelians and others who were rebelling against Calvinist ideas. One was Brook Farm, a vegetarian communal society where men and women took turns working in what would now be called a cooperative day care center. The goal, according to the reminiscences of a member, was to provide a place where mothers could leave children "as a kindly relief to themselves when fatigued by the care of them; for a primary doctrine was 'alternation of employments.' . . . Some very sweet and choice ladies attended to this employment, choosing it from their attraction towards it" (Codman, p. 134). Although Brook Farm lasted only a few years, it also acquainted influential persons with out-of-home programs for young children.

The Public Funding Issue of Today

Another generation grew up before the American public again listened to ideas of preschool education but, as Shapiro and others have documented, some of those who had been involved with the Infant Schools and with Brook Farm spoke up with renewed vigor and additional experience to introduce the Froebel kindergarten and to begin the crusade that eventually opened the public schools to young children.

Because graded schools became universal in the mid-1800s, almost all American schools now have strict age regimentation for grade placement. Since its introduction in the early 1900s, kindergarten has become the entrance grade of tax supported public schools in almost every state. Most children begin during the year they become five. Many early childhood educators are not convinced that public funded preschool programs or child care centers are really the best solution. Furthermore, because the child is still viewed as belonging to the family and not to the community, opposition to any tax funding for non-academic schooling meets strong opposition from a segment of the voting population.

Public opinion about the education of young children has demonstrated a continuity since the early colonial days of America, with its roots clearly in the Calvinistic beliefs of the Puritans who established Massachusetts Bay Colony. During the past three and half centuries, other philosophies and systems have fertilized and been entwined with those roots, but basic elements remain. Preschools remain primarily funded by parents of children enrolled. Public schools are provided through tax revenues for kindergarten through high school, representing a drop in the entrance age from seven to four or five years. Expenditure of tax revenues must be seen as financially benefitting the general population. There is wide variation from one state to another or from one community to another because the United States remains one of the few industrialized nations without a clear federal policy on public education. Charity, whether through corporate largesse or private philanthropy, remains a much desired adjunct to public school and

private day care. Since play is still suspect as a way of learning, expenditure of tax funds for child care centers or other programs continues to be justified only for pre-academic compensatory education for children of families considered to be so deficient that their children will grow up to be a burden on society.

References

Abbott, John S. C. (1972 reprint of 1834). The Mother at Home; or, the Principles of Maternal Duty Familiarly Illustrated. New York: Arno Press.

Barnard, Henry. "Infant Schools" in Connecticut Common School Journal, V. I, January 1838.

Barnard, John. (1836) "Autobiography of the Reverend John Barnard" in Massachusetts Historical Society Collections, V 5. pp 178-87.

Clark, Dorus. "Saving the Catechism" Address in Westhampton, Dec. 4, 1878, reprinted in Barnard, Henry, Ed. (1890). Papers on Froebel's Kindergarten, Hartford: Office of American Journal of Education.

Codman, John T. (1894). Brook Farm - Historic and Personal Memories. Boston: Arena.

Cotton, Joseph, cited in E. S. Morgan, Ed. (1966). The Puritan Family. NY: Harper.

Cremin, Lawrence A. (1951). The American Common School: An Historic Conception. New York: Knopf.

Cremin, Lawrence A. (1970). American Education - The Colonial Experience. New York: Harper & Row.

Cubberly, Elwood P. (1920). Public Education in the United States. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Earle, Alice Morse. (1975 reprint of 1899). Child Life in Colonial Days. Williamstown, MA: Corner House Publishers.

Martin, George H. (1894). The Evolution of the Massachusetts Public School System.. New York: D. Appleton & Co.

Mather, Cotton. (1963 revision of 1938). "Some Special Points Relating to the Education of My Children" in P. Miller and T. H. Johnson (Eds.) The Puritans - A Sourcebook of Their Writings V. 2 NY: Harper & Row Pp 724-727.

Moore, Ernest Carrol. (1917). Fifty Years of American Education. - 1867 to 1917. NY: Ginn & Co.

Pence, Alan R. (1980). Preschool Programs of the Nineteenth Century. Dissertation Abstracts International, 41, 526-A. (University Microfilms No. 801 7892)

Shapiro, Michael S. (1983). CHILD'S GARDEN; THE KINDERGARTEN MOVEMENT FROM FROEBEL TO DEWEY. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press,

Woodbridge, William. "Infant Schools" in American Annals of Education,. January 1833.